

Striker's learning how to care for mass casualties

by Spc. Paul J. Harris

3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division Public Affairs Office

FORT IRWIN, Calif. (May 29, 2007) -- "Our battalion TOC was mortared, there were casualties sustained and they were evacuated to our facility for treatment," said Sgt. 1st Class Brian Wojciechowski, treatment platoon sergeant, Company C, 64th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, referring to the mass casualty exercise he and his fellow Soldiers experienced in the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif.

A Mascal is an event after an enemy attack -- like the mortar bombardment that hit the Mountaineer's tactical operations center -- when a large number of casualties need to be treated.

"A lot of trauma, shrapnel, open chest wounds, sucking chest wounds, abdominal wounds, fractures the whole range of casualties," said Wojciechowski about the types of injuries the medics and doctors encountered after the attack.

The attack took place a couple of days after the Striker Brigade entered 'The Box.' The Box is the nickname given to the area where actual combat operations occur at the NTC. For some doctors and Soldiers this was their first chance to experience a combat-like event.

"We got a lot of new people in this brigade right now," said Capt. Scott Tebo, brigade surgeon, 3rd BCT, 4th ID. "A lot of our docs are fresh out of residency and most of the exposure they have had to trauma care, much less the military, has been (Officer Basic Course)."

Tebo himself is new to the brigade staff level, only holding the position one month prior coming to the NTC.

“The biggest thing we need to accomplish is we need to gel as a team,” Tebo said.

He had three main points for his staff to work on when training in the high desert area: airways, breathing and controlling hemorrhage.

In civilian medical practice there is an informal term used to describe a patient's most critical moment of survival, it's called the 'Golden Hour.' Tebo said the military medical corps has turned that saying into the 'Platinum Ten' referring more to the critical 10 minutes after an injury occurs on the battlefield.

“My own personal challenge here is adjusting to being more of a staff officer than a doctor,” Tebo said. “Treating patients is what I became a doctor for and that is what I enjoy most.”

Making sure the parts of 'Charlie Med' run as smooth as clockwork is 1st Sgt. Thomas Callantine, first sergeant, Co. C, 64th BSB. His goal for training was to set up operations as the company hit the ground running.

“Having the ability to set up health care to the point where we can shoot X-rays, we can work on dental patients and we can run labs,” Callantine said. “We reached that level within three-and-a-half hours of hitting the ground and the standard is four hours.”

Though happy with the company performance during the Mascal, Callantine only graded them a B-plus.

“Little things like shades for the patients, we have them sitting in the open right now, that is one thing that I would want to fix,” Callantine said.

Callantine was not the only Soldier downgrading the performance. For Pvt. Marcus Madden, patient administrative specialist, Co. C, 64th BSB, he was a bit disappointed in himself. For Madden this also is his first time training in a near real-world environment. “At first I was a little nervous (at the beginning of the Mascal), wondering where is my staff, where is the other PAD clerk at?” Madden said, “and then eventually I caught on and started taking information down.”

Madden’s duty is to get vital patient information before evacuating the patient to a higher level of care. He, along with the many of his fellow Soldiers, is getting used to the 100 degree heat while still having to perform to standard.

“I plan on gaining more knowledge about my job when we have (the next) Mascal,” said Madden. “I should be better prepared next time.”

It is that type of enthusiasm that Wojciechowski wants to see in his young crew as they train for another possible deployment to Iraq.

“They are progressing,” Wojciechowski said. “The longer they are here the more the chance we have to work with them. It is crawl, walk, run and we are building.”



Soldiers from Company C, 64th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, evacuate a simulated casualty after a replicated mortar attack at the National Training Center in Fort Irwin, Calif. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Paul J. Harris, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division Public Affairs Office, May 29, 2007)



Attending to her patient is Spc. Heidi Freeman, medic, Company C, 64th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, during a mass casualty training exercise at the National Training Center in Fort Irwin, Calif. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Paul J. Harris, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division Public Affairs Office, May 29, 2007)



A litter team from Company C, 64th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, carries a simulated patient to an awaiting ambulance during a mass casualty training exercise at the National Training Center in Fort Irwin, Calif. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Paul J. Harris, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division Public Affairs Office, May 29, 2007)



A litter team from Company C, 64th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, loads a simulated patient into an ambulance during a mass casualty training exercise at the National Training Center in Fort Irwin, Calif. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Paul J. Harris, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division Public Affairs Office, May 29, 2007)



A litter team from Company C, 64th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, loads a patient with simulated head trauma into an ambulance during a mass casualty training exercise at the National Training Center in Fort Irwin, Calif. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Paul J. Harris, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division Public Affairs Office, May 29, 2007)